Laryngeal realism revisited: voicelessness in Breton

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Plan

- Setting the scene, Part I: laryngeal realism, Element Theory, and the status of H
- Setting the scene, Part II: pre-sonorant voicing and its interpretation
- Bothoa Breton is a "H language" phonologically despite its Romance-like obstruent system
- Added bonus: there is a ternary contrast on the surface, and it is better implemented in feature-geometrical terms

Laryngeal realism

- Classic position: [±voice] is all there is, most recently Wetzels & Mascaró (2001)
- "Laryngeal realism" (Iverson & Salmons 1995, 1999, 2003a,b, 2007; Avery 1996; Honeybone 2001, 2005, 2008, forthcoming; Jessen & Ringen 2002, *inter alia*)
  - "L languages" (Romance, Slavic, Dutch?, Yiddish?): short-lag VOT vs. consistent prevoicing in stops — ∅ vs. [voice];
  - "H languages" (English, German, Welsh, Turkish): long-lag VOT vs. variably voiced stops — [spread glottis] vs. ∅.
- Similar approaches in GP/DP/Element Theory (e. g. Harris 1994, 2009; Harris & Lindsey 1995; Backley 2011)

Phonetic essentialism: some issues

- Issue 1: H often associated with [spread glottis] — undue focus on stops and VOT
  - Fricatives can show [spread glottis] phonological activity irrespective of VOT (Rice 1994; Vaux 1998; Iverson & Salmons 2003b; van Oostendorp 2003)
  - Logically, glottal spreading does not necessarily entail positive VOT, it can just inhibit voicing
  - Inconsistent with surface behaviour (e. g. English coda glottaling)
- Issue 2: phonetic bias
  - H languages often tend to have variable voicing in stops: assumed to be "passive", reflecting its lack of specification (e. g. Jessen & Ringen 2002; Jansen 2004; Honeybone 2005)
  - Corollary: categorical presence of laryngeal activity implies *phonological* specification (Ringen & Helgason 2004; Petrova et al. 2006; Helgason & Ringen 2008; Beckman et al. 2009, 2011)

Phonetic and phonological patterning

- What if we only look at phonological patterns when dealing with phonological representations?
- Phonetics should not determine phonology (cf. Rice 1994, *passim*)
- It should be logically possible to have a "H language" with "L-type" phonetics
- E. g. with H stops realized with short-lag VOT
- Rather obvious proposal
  - GP/DP circles: Cyran (2010, 2011);
  - Also Blaho (2008).
- Problem: evidence sometimes hinges on pre-sonorant voicing
- Cyran (2011) on Kraków/Poznań Polish: PSV is the mirror image of final devoicing, i. e. H deletion

Phonological problems with PSV

- Especially acute in a contrast-based framework
- If PSV is treated as a phonological spreading process...
  - ...where do the vowels and sonorants get redundant voicing specifications?
    - They are voiced because there is full specification
    - They receive redundant [+voice] postlexically
  - ...why does PSV sometimes do strange things?
    - In some Breton dialects (e. g. Jackson 1960), PSV in stops parallels [x]∼[h]
    - In some Dutch dialects PSV creates [g], which is otherwise marginal at best

Representational solution

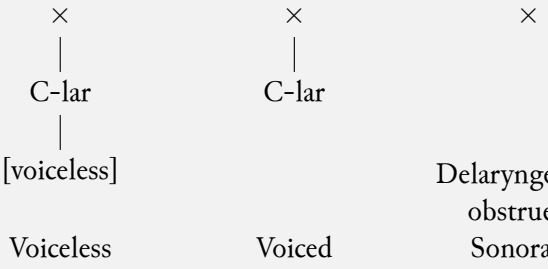
- The representational solution is to assume that PSV derives from the same surface underspecification process that gives variable voicing of lenis stops in H languages
- Jansen (2004) for West Flemish
- Colina (2009) for Ecuadorian Spanish
- Cyran (2011) for Kraków/Poznań Polish
- Solves the phonological problems very nicely
- But is PSV phonological?

Phonetic problems with PSV

- Strycharczuk (2010): Poznań Polish PSV not neutralizing → no evidence for the H/L question
- Strycharczuk & Simon (forthcoming): West Flemish PSV not assimilatory, involves categoricity (optional choice between categorical variants), inconsistent with the surface-underspecification analysis
- Are we entitled to use PSV evidence for phonological representations?
- Not unless there is other robust phonological evidence
- Which is why I'm here today

The proposal I

- Bothoa Breton (Humphreys 1995) contrasts three types of consonants on the surface



- In other words, voiced obstruents are less structurally marked than voiceless obstruents (Causley 1999; Rice 2003)

The proposal II

- Explicit formulation of an old insight:
  - Carlyle (1988): “elsewhere” redundancy rule assigns [+voice] to obstruents;
  - Krämer (2000): Onset Voicing
  - Hall (2009): Default Voicing
- Key criteria
  - Phonological activity of [voiceless];
  - No phonological activity of [voice] separate from [voiceless];
  - Word-final delaryngealization: evidence from interaction with floating features supports the surface-underspecification treatment of pre-sonorant voicing

Inventory

- The segment [h] is isolated, but is it [voiced] or [voiceless]?
- Obstruent system Romance-like with prevoicing (Bothorel 1982; Humphreys 1995)

Manner	Labial	Coronal	Postalveolar	Palatal-labial	Palatal	Dorsal	Glottal
Stops	p b	t d				k g	
Affricates			ʧ ʤ				
Fricatives	f v	s z	ʃ ʒ				h
Nasals	m	n			ɲ̃		
Laterals		l					
Rhotics		r					
Approximants	w			ɥ	j		

- Actually, can be either, depending on context:
  - [h] or [ɦ] word-initially, before a (voiceless) consonant, word-medially after [l r]
  - [x] utterance-finally or word-finally
  - [ɦ̃] or [ɣ̃] in voiced contexts
- Phonologically, it is clearly voiceless

Word-level phonology

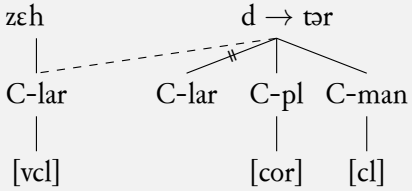
- I give suffixed forms to avoid final devoicing
- Assimilation:

(1)	a.	(i)	[ɛsˈkɔbjən]	‘bishops’
		(ii)	[ɛsˈkɔpti]	‘diocese’
	b.	(i)	[ˈtom]	‘warm’
		(ii)	[ˈtomdər]	‘heat’
		(iii)	[ˈzɛːho]	‘to dry’
		(iv)	[ˈzɛhtər]	‘drought’

- Preservation of the marked (Causley 1999; de Lacy 2006): assimilatory neutralization preserves the bigger structure

Assimilation: the geometry

- Assume something compels two adjacent obstruents to share a laryngeal specification...
- ...and don't think too much about delinking vs. coalescence of C-lar nodes...



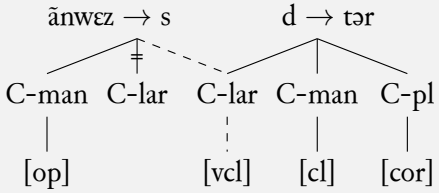
Complications

- In fact, obstruent clusters are mostly voiceless in Bothoa Breton

(2)	a.	(i)	[ãnˈwɛːzo]	'to offend'
		(ii)	[ãnˈwɛstər]	'humiliation'
	b.	(i)	[ˈkaːzəg̊]	'cat'
		(ii)	[ˈbjan]	'small'
		(iii)	[ˌkasˈpjan]	'kitten'

- Some sort of licensing requirement forcing the addition of [voiceless] to multiply linked C-lar (cf. van Oostendorp 2003)

The geometry



- Why is this important?
- Because postlexically the situation is quite different

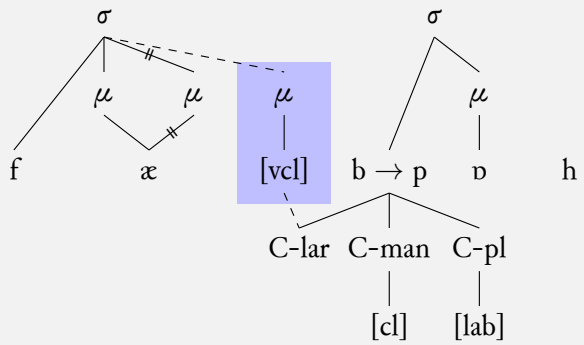
Further evidence for [voiceless]

- "Provection": associated with certain suffixes
  - Voiced obstruents devoice
  - Vowels in closed syllables shorten
  - Voiceless obstruents and sonorants unaffected

(3)	a.	(i)	[fæbˈliːʒən]	'weakness'
		(ii)	[ˈfæːb̥]	'weak'
		(iii)	[ˈfæpɒh]	'weaker'
	b.	(i)	[ˈkaːzəg̊]	'cat'
		(ii)	[ˈkasad̥]	'to be on heat (of cats)'

Analysis

- I suggest the facts are best analysed with a floating mora associated with a C-lar[vcl] feature



- Evidence for the activity of [voiceless]
- Some forms still retain the [h]: ['skɑ̃ː] 'light', ['skɑ̃ː(h)ɒh] 'lighter'

Word-level phonology: summary

- Apart from final devoicing (to which we return), there is little evidence for the marked status of voiced obstruents
- In particular, they are not triggers of assimilation
- Voiceless obstruents and [h] demonstrate phonological activity:
  - Preservation in assimilation
  - Triggers in additive processes
- Important generalization: at the word level, obstruent clusters neutralize to voiceless
- ☞ Robust evidence for the phonological activity of [voiceless]

Further evidence for [voiceless]: the provective mutation

- Triggered by certain proclitics
- Voiceless obstruents unaffected; voiced ones devoice

(4)	a.	(i)	['kaːz̥]	'cat'
		(ii)	[o 'kaːz̥]	'your (pl.) cat'
	b.	(i)	['brøːr]	'brother'
		(ii)	[o 'prøːr]	'your (pl.) brother'

- Vowel and sonorants are prefixed with [h]:

(5)	a.	(i)	['alve]	'key'
		(ii)	[o 'halve]	'your (pl.) key'
	b.	(i)	['lɛvər]	'book'
		(ii)	[o 'hlɛvər]	'your (pl.) book'

- Best analysis: [h] coalescing with obstruents
- Corollary: [h] is [voiceless]

Pre-sonorant voicing

- Bothoa Breton seems to have it

(6)	a.	(i)	['kɔgəw]	'roosters'
		(ii)	[kɔg iz'maj]	'Yves-Marie's rooster'
	b.	(i)	['tɔkəw]	'hats'
		(ii)	[on ˌtɔg 'al]	'another hat'

- Although it doesn't sound very phonological
- « Il faut se rappeler [...] que l'alternance sourde/sonore, qui représente la catégorie plus importante de ces modifications, n'est pas, sur le plan phonétique, un simple choix binaire : on rencontre assez souvent, non seulement des sourdes douces, mais aussi des consonnes à sonorité décroissante. Plus le débit rapide et l'articulation relâchée, plus les assimilations sont poussées. » (Humphreys 1995)

Pre-sonorant voicing

- Phonetic data not available
- Still, I analyse this (and final devoicing) as word-final delaryngealization à la Jansen (2004); Colina (2009)
- Crucially, there is more evidence for the lack of specification
- One piece of evidence is that word-final obstruents become *voiced* before voiced obstruents

(7) a. ['lɒst] 'tail'
b. [ˌlɒzd 'bɛːr] 'short tail'

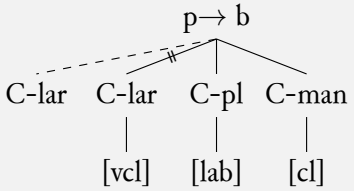
- Which is precisely the opposite of what happens at the word level
- But couldn't this just be a reranking at different strata? Well, yes

Devoicing sandhi, part I: lenition

- The lenition mutation involves voicing of stops

(8) a. ['pəwr] 'poor'
b. [o ˌvroː 'bəwr] 'a poor country'

- Under the present assumptions, it must be the docking of a floating C-lar node



Devoicing sandhi, part II: the sandhi

- Some words beginning with voiced stops in isolation undergo devoicing when following an obstruent (Krämer 2000; Hall 2009)

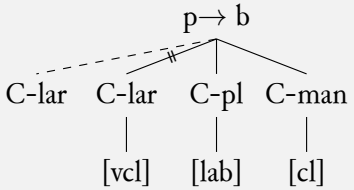
(9) a. ['gãntæ] 'with them'
b. [də 'gas kãntæ] 'to carry with them'
c. *[də 'gaz gãntæ]

- Crucially, the same unexpected voiceless cluster is found in lenition contexts (although it is usually described as a "failure of lenition")

(10) a. ['koːg̥] 'old'
b. [o ˌgaːdər 'goːg̥] 'an old chair'
c. [on ˌiːlis 'koːg̥] 'an old church'
d. *[on ˌiːliz 'goːg̥]

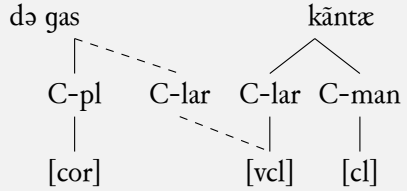
Analysis

- I suggest that both types of phenomena can be unified in terms of a C-lar floating node
- It is better to dock to an unspecified obstruent than to a specified one
- If there is no suitable site to the left (sonorants and vowels cannot be laryngeally specified), dock to the right → lenition.



Analysis

- If there is a suitable site to the left, dock there
- (Stratal alert!) Word-final obstruents come delaryngealized from the word level
- Docking to the left creates a domain for the spreading of [voiceless]



How is that evidence for underspecification?

- Normally, C-lar[vcl] does not spread across a word boundary
- Sequences of a nasal and a (delaryngealized) stop undergo variable progressive assimilation of nasality in pre-sonorant position

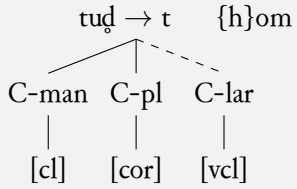
(11) a. ['dãnː] 'tooth'
b. ['dãnd al] 'another tooth'

- In this respect, they differ from sequences of a nasal and a stop that has acquired a floating C-lar[vcl] feature (again!)

(12) a. Floating C-lar[vcl]
(i) [om] 'our'
(ii) [ˌtut om 'amzər] 'all our time'
(iii) *[ˌtud om 'amzər]
b. After nasals
(i) [gãnt i 'hwɛːr] 'with his sister'
(ii) *[gãnː i 'hwɛːr]

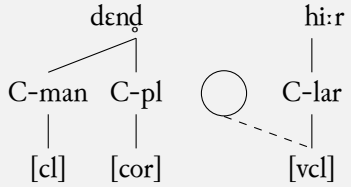
No [vcl] spreading across a word boundary

- Familiar analysis...



- But the C-lar[vcl] from an actual segment does not do this:

(13) a. [ˌdɛnː 'hiːr] 'long teeth'
b. *[ˌdɛnt 'hiːr]



Conclusion

- (There is a similar story to be told about prefixes)
- Both at the lexical and the postlexical level, there is ample evidence for the marked nature (phonological activity) of the feature [voiceless]
- The evidence for the phonological activity of [voice] is weak, despite the phonetics
- Crucially, a distinction must be made between contrastive non-specification (bare C-lar) and underspecification (no C-lar)
- Laryngeal underspecification of word-final obstruents makes sense even if we do not view pre-sonorant voicing as an argument
- But it surely is a nice result for the surface-undespecification theory of PSV

Problems with phonetic essentialism I

- There are two types of empirical problems with laryngeal realism
- ☞ Unexpected categoricity
  - An "H language" like German is predicted to have variable/"passive" voicing of lenis stops
  - Apparently borne out in German, English, Welsh, Turkish, Irish...
  - Counterexamples:
    - Overspecified, fully voiced lenis stops: Swedish (Ringen & Helgason 2004; Helgason & Ringen 2008; Beckman et al. 2011), possibly Île de Groix Breton (Ternes 1970)
    - Lenis stops with categorical short-lag VOT and no passive voicing: Icelandic, Scottish Gaelic
    - Confer also categorical voicing in German fricatives (Beckman et al. 2009)
  - On the other hand, these overspecified categories tend to be relatively inert phonologically (cf. Ringen & Helgason 2004)

Problems with phonetic essentialism II

- ☞ Passive voicing isn't
  - Westbury (1983); Westbury & Keating (1986): English speakers do expand the supraglottal cavity for lenis stops, it just happens to be insufficient to sustain voicing
  - Kingston & Diehl (1994, 1995); Kingston et al. (2008): "lenis/voiced obstruents" are a category that English speakers cue, even if there is no consistent closure voicing

Substance-free to the rescue

- The present approach resolves both issues
- "Lenis" obstruents in H languages are contrastively specified for C-lar, not underspecified because of lack of contrast
- Overspecification is expected
- ☞ Substance-free: the realization is language-specific
  - Prevoicing as in Swedish
  - Devoicing as in Icelandic
  - Multiple cues as in English (German? Welsh?)
- Also explains why English voicing is not entirely passive
- Still compatible with English being a H language, *pace* Kingston et al. (2009)

Conclusions: Breton

- Bothoa Breton is best treated as a language where voiceless obstruents are more marked than voiced ones
- Despite its Romance-like phonetics
- There is a ternary contrast *on the surface*, with delaryngealized obstruents in weak (neutralization-inducing) positions
- Privative features and feature geometry reflect markedness relationships better than binary features

Conclusions: laryngeal realism

- Substance-free laryngeal realism (“laryngeal relativism”; Cyran 2011)
- Languages can be H or L irrespective of their phonetics
- Surface underspecification is less widespread than often suggested
- Surface underspecification expected only in contrast-neutralization conditions, rarely across the board
- Does not invalidate the main insight

Trugarez!

Things to ask

Is there real data?

- Sorry, not yet. Treat this as a falsifiable prediction.

Ask me about...

- Prefixes (see bonus slides)
- Richness of the Base: what happens to delaryngealized obstruents in the input
- Surface underspecification and pre-sonorant voicing: a rôle for categorical distributions

Bonus: prefixes I

- Two productive prefixes: /had/ ‘re-’ and /diz/ ‘not’
- Behave like pwords in many respects
  - Consistently stressed
  - Final consonants behave like word-final ones
- /had/ is easy

(14) a. ['desko] ‘learn’
b. [ˌha'd·esko] ‘relearn’

- Secondary stress on light syllable (otherwise rare)
- No devoicing (*contra* Hemon 1940; Press 1986)

☞ It’s just a pword

Bonus: prefixes II

- /diz/ is harder

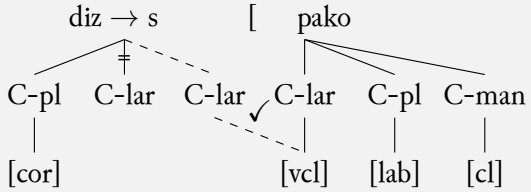
(15)

a.	(i)	['alve]	‘key’
	(ii)	[ˌdi'zalve]	‘opening’
b.	(i)	['pako]	‘pack’
	(ii)	[ˌdis'pako]	‘unpack’
c.	(i)	['ba:dio]	‘baptize’
	(ii)	[ˌdiz'va:dio]	‘rename’

- Seems to be /diz/
- Causes lenition (/b/ → [v])
- This means we could have expected *[dizbako], but obstruent clusters are expected to be voiceless...
- Why not *[ˌdis'fa:dio] then?

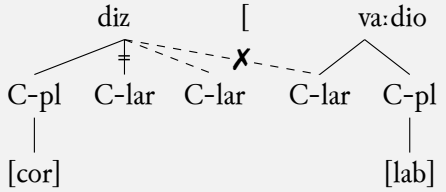
Bonus: prefixes III

- I suggest it is /diz + {C-lar}/
- In [ˌdi'zalve], C-lar docking is vacuous
- In [ˌdis'pako], devoicing is entirely parallel to devoicing sandhi (recall prefixes are also pword-like domains)



Bonus: prefixes IV

- There are two explananda with [ˌdiz'va:dio]
- Lack of cluster devoicing: spread of C-lar blocked across a word boundary, no incentive to epenthesize [vcl]
- Lack of coda delaryngealization: floating C-lar provides the feature



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